

TEXAS COLLEGE RESPONSE
TO THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Rep. Chris Turner, Chair

Submitted by Dr. Dwight J. Fennell
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1. Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, dormitories and dining halls.

Response:

Texas College is a private liberal arts institution, located in Tyler, TX. As a result of precautionary measures taken since March 2020, the college has not experienced occurrences of the pandemic at the campus. The college is however in a city/county (of East Texas) where the infection rate continues to rise. At this writing, Smith County has the highest rate reported as 2,717.

The administration of the college has and continues to monitor the infection rate and science of the pandemic. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, the fall term of the institution is with online learning only. Further, the administration has chosen to suspend participation in all fall term sports, with the decisions about the spring term being under review, per the infection/death rates.

It should be noted however that while the institution operates in a virtual capacity planning continues for the return of face-to-face instruction with:

- Creating multi-purpose space for safe distancing and use.
 - Expanding technology professional development of faculty.
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- Expanding campus bandwidth for virtual platform expansion.
 - Modifying classroom and residential space with safe distancing.
 - Identifying PPE supply lines who can deliver timely.
 - Modifying dining and food services areas.
 - Maintaining and expanding consortia relations and discussions about best practices and institutional sharing (where possible and appropriate).

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

Response:

Texas College has the capacity to offer COVID-19 testing; however, the availability of tests and getting supply chains to provide tests and PPEs are of concern, as they are slow in responding. The administration views the matter of testing as very significant to maintaining a safe environment. It should be noted however that the availability of tests is limited and are not being offered as options for many higher education institutions. And, it should be noted that testing beyond temperature checks are of interest as a result of some individuals being asymptomatic and temperature checks do not reveal such.

3. If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletics this Fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

Response:

As a matter of safety, Texas College will not engage in any fall term sports. The administration will use the local and national data reports from fall term (sports) activities to plan for the spring, should the pandemic appear to be lessened and should a vaccine be established. It should be noted however that the coaching staffs for fall term sports are meeting with team members virtually to offer professional development/leadership discussions and conditioning measures.

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- 4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like to institutions for this school year?**

Response:

At the time of this submission, it is very evident that the pandemic is impinging upon the enrollment. Many of our students need/require financial support and such support has been lost and limited as a result of their employment situations being considered non-essential. And, although some of the students may qualify for federal financial assistance, many do not want to assume loans to re-enter the educational process. It should be noted that the administration seeks to offer scholarship supports but cannot do so with large volumes of need as an independent institution.

- 5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?**

Response:

Prior to moving into the school year, Texas College conducted a survey of faculty to assess concerns about face-to-face instruction. The survey results illustrated many had concerns as a result of pre-existing medical conditions, age and the lack of codifications with measures of safety at the city, county state and federal levels. Notwithstanding, when the administration determined to have online offerings, fears and concerns were allayed.

- 6. Health Related Institutions were exempt from the 5% budget cuts earlier this year, due to their important role in resolving the public health crisis. What are some of the programs, research, and responses to the pandemic that our Health-Related Institutions have contributed?**

Response:

Not applicable.

- 7. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?**

Response:

The COVID-19 fiscal supports overall proved to be Beneficial to the institution. It should be noted however

that the restrictions of some of the funding supports created imitations of how institutions could better serve students. And, with the emergency actions that needed to be covered financially (by institutions) with the onset of the pandemic, the funding did not (in many instances) allow for financial replacement lost.

8. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges?

Response:

Texas College is a four-year baccalaureate degree granting institution which averages approximately 1,100 students; the institution does not have the status of a rural and/or community college, but is considered smaller in size in contrast to many public institutions.

As a smaller (independent) institution which generally depends on enrollment, the pandemic introduced a great deal of financial stress and concerns among students to re-enroll, which also impacts the financial status of the institution. To date, my institution's enrollment is down by approximately 200 students. Further, it should also be noted that because many students who work, are considered as "non-essential" employees and have been furloughed and/or experiencing loss of employment, are not in a position to re-enroll, thus affecting the revenue generation of the institution. The latter is an occurrence that higher education is experiencing in spite of institutional size.
